

Their Engagement Was Not Broken

By F. A. MITCHEL

Dora Atterbury was an especially feminine young lady. Nevertheless she was very bright. She distinguished herself at college and after being graduated engaged herself to Professor Ernest Ballinger, a young man equally brilliant and whose specialty was biology. They had been engaged some time when the professor received a note from his fiancée asking to be released from her engagement for the reason that she had decided to study a profession and she considered a profession for a woman incompatible with married life. Professor Ballinger called upon her.

"I think it best," he said, "that I should release you."

There was a slight contraction of Dora's brows at this. She had asked to be released, but preferred that she should be required to struggle for her freedom.

"You agree with me, I presume, that a professional woman has no business to be married?"

"My reason lies deeper than that," replied the professor, unconsciously falling into a tone used in lecturing to his classes. "You are aware, I presume, that there are cases of effeminacy in men. Some psychologists hold that this occurs from environment. I do not admit this. I consider it the result of birth accident. Such men are born effeminate—that is, they partake mentally of the nature of the opposite sex."

"I cannot see," interrupted Dora, "what that has to do with the matter between us."

"Be patient, and you will see. The corresponding accident to this in women, viraginity, renders a woman as much of a freak of nature as a man who is born effeminate. Viraginites take up men's occupations naturally"—

"Do you mean to assert that all women who enter the field of law, medicine, business, are viraginites?"

"No, but I mean that viraginites naturally turn to men's occupations."

The views promulgated by her fiancé were evidently not acceptable to Miss Atterbury. In her features was expressed opposition to his theory, mingled with pain at foreseeing that he was about to apply it to herself.

"I do not agree with you in referring these things to birth accident," she said. "I know a young man whose only companion as a child was his sister. He is very effeminate."

"In this case possibly his effeminacy came from environment, but I doubt it. In the case of women who possess traits of men we have analogous cases in certain birds. After a certain age the female assumes the plumage of the male and will destroy the eggs of her species. This cannot result from environment, because environment could not alter her plumage."

Miss Atterbury did not at all like this result of her announcement of the breaking of her engagement and the reason she had given for breaking it. She began to look troubled.

"The upshot of all this," she said, "I presume, is that I am a freak of nature."

"That does not necessarily follow," replied the professor imperturbably.

"Not necessarily, but it is evident from what you have said that you consider me such."

"My views are not the views of all psychologists, and not all women who adopt men's pursuits are viragoes, though I believe that most of them

are."

"You have not answered my question."

"What question?"

"Whether or not you regard me as a freak."

"You did not ask such a question. You said that you presumed the upshot of my theory was that you were a freak of nature."

"Do you or do you not so regard me?"

"My opinion can have no effect on the truth. If your intention to take up a profession is the result of birth accident, so be it. My dictum would not prove or disprove the fact."

There was silence for some moments, during which the young lady was absorbed in thought.

"Could you love such a woman freak?" she asked presently.

"Men love their opposites. No man can feel toward another man as toward a woman."

"It seems impossible," replied Dora, with quivering lip, "to pin you down to anything. If I am one of these horrid freaks you speak of, how is it that you could have loved me thus far?"

"You forget that heretofore I have not so considered you."

"But you do now?"

"Not at all. Your desire to take up a man's profession causes me to suspect. Your taking up the profession would be additional evidence. Your practicing the profession would—in my opinion, mind you—be as good proof as it is possible to attain in your individual case."

"You suspect"—on the verge of tears.

The professor took her in his arms. Science gave way to tenderness, and the debate ended in a multitude of kisses.

Miss Atterbury preferred to do away with all suspicion that she was a freak by taking a husband instead of a profession. He afterward confessed that he had arrived at no definite conclusion upon the subject they had been discussing and only promulgated his theory to avoid losing her. Whether or not he was correct, they lived happily together ever afterward.

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